

Military Engagement, self-concept and on-base living

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Abstract

Conceptual Framework: The study of trainee engagement, albeit a recent concept, has been getting a special attention due to the assumption that the promotion of engagement in training can shape the effects of organizational resources over performance, well-being and quality of life in general, thus benefitting not only the individuals, but organizations as well. **Objectives:** The present study aims to analyze the differences in engagement regarding self-concept and context factors of trainees attending the Training Courses for Petty Officers 1st Class (CFS). **Methodology:** The methodology made use of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá & Bakker, 2002), the Assessment Scale for Trainee Engagement in the Portuguese Navy (Frade & Veiga, 2014), as well as the Assessment Scale for Trainee Self-concept in the Portuguese Navy (Frade & Veiga, in press; Frade, 2015). The sample was comprised of 149 trainees from the CFS of the Portuguese Navy. The data collected were analyzed using SPSS software. **Results:** Trainees living off-base and with more self-concept have reached higher levels of engagement than those presenting low self-concept. In cases of low self-concept, trainees living on-base reached higher levels of engagement when compared to those living off-base.

Conclusion: The result analysis allowed the finding of relationships between trainee engagement, self-concept and on-base living. There was an intention of getting directions to support the action of the Portuguese Navy with the engagement of its human resources in learning situations and work realization.

Keywords: Engagement, self-concept, on-base living, adult training, military context

1. Introduction

Engagement is seen as a type of motivated action, that is, energized, directed, sustained and highly related to the trainee's beliefs (Frade & Veiga, 2013). Self-perceptions affect, therefore, the way the subject disposes himself to the chores (Linnerbrink & Pintrich, 2002), and in the way he acts for its accomplishment. Many authors affirm that students' perception about their competences affect their performance, their persistency and their involvement in the chore (Bandura, 1997; Marsh, 1990; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002; Sá, 2004; Schunk, 2004). Accordingly, Bryson and Williams (2013) defend that the involvement is mediated by the experience of the students, regarding their objectives, aspirations, values and beliefs.

It is important to underline in a more specific way the relation among some particular aspects of the self-concept and the involvement. One of those aspects is satisfaction. Satisfaction, here perceived, is related with Locke's conception (1976), who characterizes it as an emotional positive pleasant state that results of the self-evaluation of the work or experiences work related. Satisfaction is considered an attitude regarding the evaluation made by the subject of its work concerning the affective and cognitive aspects (Fisher, 2000). Several authors (Harter, Schmidt, & Keyes, 2002; Paschoal & Tamayo, 2008) consider that the existence of positive emotions affects in a positive way the wealth in work. According Van Horn, Taris, Schaufeli and Scheurs (2004), the feeling of well-being at work is perceived as a positive evaluation of different characteristics of work environment, including affective aspects. Analogously, Siqueira and Padovam (2008) defend that work related well-being integrates positive affective bonds with the professional performance (satisfaction and involvement) and with the organisation (affective commitment). Al Hussami (2008) considers that satisfied workers tend to be more productive and

to feel a bigger organisational involvement. The relationship between satisfaction at work and organisational commitment is highlighted, by several authors, as being strong (Campion, Medsker, & Higgs, 1993; Mobley 1977; Nielsen, Jex, & Adams, 2000; Warr, Cook, & Wall, 1979). And individual's satisfaction about its work affects positively their performance in the execution of chores, and its level of confidence in their supervisor and work colleagues (Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974; Siqueira & Gomide Júnior, 2004; Weiss, 2002). Several authors (Ferreira & Siqueira, 2005; Harter et al., 2002) agree that a bigger satisfaction with work makes the individuals more cooperative, punctual, efficient and prone to help their colleagues, besides influencing the employee's intention in remaining in the company. Regarding the exposed, it is understandable that the individual's satisfaction towards its work has an impact in their involvement and well-being, influencing, not only the working activities, but as well as the social context the subject is inserted in (Danna & Griffin, 1999).

In light of the present study, there is still to consider the fact that many military find themselves in an asylum seeker situation, once their residence zone is over 120 km, allowing them to use the Marine facilities. It is thought that the need to have asylum in the same institution in which they pay service could influence the military motivation and involvement. Therefore, in a first look, this condition is related with the displacement regarding the origin residence, adding the fact that the asylum seeker is submitted to norms, rules and schedules of the unit he is in. Facing what precedes, it is necessary to regard the condition of asylum seeker, together with the self-concept, in the study of involvement of military.

It is thereby important to understand the differences in engagement regarding self-concept and the relevant sociodemographic variables, such as the asylum seeker condition, so that one may stimulate engagement among the military personnel in training.

2. Method

The study is presented below, starting with sample subjects, followed procedures and presentation of the instruments applied to assess the engagement and self-concept of the trainees from the Training Course for Petty Officers 1st Class (CFS).

2.1 Sample

This study considered a representative heterogeneous and non-probability sample of the 149 trainees attending the Training Course for Petty Officers 1st Class (CFS) which started in 2011 and 2012. This population consists of young adults, ages ranging from 25 to 38 (average age of 30,87 and standard deviation of 2,98), of both genders (92,6% male and 7,4% female). Joining the Portuguese Navy meant leaving the residence area to 53,7% of the trainees, having 45% maintained the same residence area. 20,8% of the trainees live on-base, in the barracks, since their residence area is located over 120 km, and they may therefore make use of navy facilities. The Training Course for Petty Officers 1st Class is composed of several classes with seventeen specialties (artilleryman, radar operator, torpedo man's mate, machinist's mate, mechanical automobile driver, electrician's mate, ship's serviceman, mess management specialist, marine, gunner's mate, clerk, electromechanical technician, operations specialist, driver and services).

2.2 Procedure

After research approval by the Chief of Staff of the Portuguese Navy the course directors were asked for permission to conduct the survey. Once the survey was authorized, the data were collected outside working hours, immediately after classes or inside the classrooms, according to the availability of the trainers accompanying the process and without prejudice to the training. The students were told that cooperation was voluntary and anonymity was ensured. Before completing the questionnaires, the survey's objectives were explained and some particularities of the questionnaire clarified.

2.3 Instruments

To develop the present study three scales were used: two of them to assess engagement and one to assess self-concept. One of the engagement scales considered was the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) (Schaufeli et al., 2002). The results from the UWES psychometric analysis, adapted to the Portuguese military context, verify that this instrument presents factorial validity, with the extraction of two significant dimensions (identified considering the original scale – dedication and vigour (DeVi)): sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and challenge, the latter corresponding to high levels of energy and mental resilience at work, will to invest at work, and persistence in difficult situations; as well as absorption (Abso) – a state of high concentration and time seeming to fly. The other engagement scale considered was the Assessment Scale for Trainee Engagement in the Portuguese Navy (ASTE-PN), (Frade & Veiga, 2014; Frade, 2015). The results from the ASTE-PN psychometric analysis verify that this instrument presents factorial validity, with the extraction of three dimensions: cognitive engagement (ECog) – related to motivational goals and self-regulated learning; affective engagement (EAfe) – related to trainee attitude, interests and values; and behavioural engagement (ECom) – related to trainee conduct and behaviour expressed towards the institution and in performing the training tasks.

The scale used for self-concept assessment was the Assessment Scale for Trainee Self-Concept in the Portuguese Navy – ASTSC-PN (Escala de Avaliação do Autoconceito – Marinha Portuguesa (EAA-MP)) (Frade & Veiga, in press; Frade, 2015). The results from the ASTSC-PN – adapted to the Portuguese military context – psychometric analysis verify that this instrument presents factorial validity, with the extraction of five significant dimensions: interpersonal relationships (RIP) – perception of interpersonal relationships established with comrades and other community elements, as well as the perception of safety and integration regarding their relationship with others; competence (COM) – sense of the individual's trust in one's own professional abilities, as having the necessary skills to perform the tasks assigned, as well as the sense of ability to solve problems inherent to the performance of the individual's functions; satisfaction (SAT) – self-assessment regarding work and the performed functions,

encompassing the affective and emotional components of individual experiences and beliefs; self-acceptance (SAP) – sense of self-knowledge and the skill to acknowledge one's own abilities and difficulties; as well as initiative and risk acceptance (ARI) – the individual's ability to put in effort and face risks.

The considered sociodemographic variable was the place of residence (POR) – whether or not the trainees were living on-base, inside navy facilities.

3. Results

Next follows the analysis of the engagement results considering self-concept and the sociodemographic variables with which we intended to verify whether the result differentiation – in the considered dimensions – could be due to the interaction of both factors and hereby answer the study's question: How are engagement and self-concept related, and what factors are they influenced by?

Given the high amount of gathered information, we chose to solely present the cases with statistical significance in the interaction of the independent variables. Hence, the presented tables only highlight these significant values. It is still worth mentioning that, in the cases not presented, the self-concept dimensions expressed a statistically significant effect in all engagement dimensions.

3.1 Engagement differences considering satisfaction and age

Table 1 presents the variance analyses performed with the “Anova” procedure of SPSS. Considering the main effect of satisfaction, these analyses showed that the engagement differences between the two trainee groups (living on-base and off-base) acquired statistical significance in four engagement dimensions: dedication and vigor ($F = 11.095$; $p < .001$), as well as in cognitive ($F = 9.102$; $p < .01$), affective ($F = 14.129$; $p < .001$), and behavioral ($F = 16.867$; $p < .001$) engagement. The variance analyses show that the place of residence does not represent a differentiating variable.

Table 1. Analysis of result variance in engagement, considering self-acceptance and age.

	GL	QM	F	S	QM	F	S			
	DeVi				Abso					
SAT	1	433.813	11.095	***	45.003	3.009	ns			
POR	1	115.011	2.941	ns	15.644	1.046	ns			
SAT *OBL	1	98.696	2.524	ns	67.284	4.499	*			
	GL	QM	F	S	QM	F	S	QM	F	S
	ECog				EAfe			ECom		
SAT	1	342.986	9.102	**	527.057	14.129	***	167.374	16.867	***
POR	1	47.062	1.249	ns	89.579	2.401	ns	.073	.007	ns
SAT *POR	1	24.452	.649	ns	152.076	4.077	*	48.442	4.882	*

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$; ns = not significant

In what concerns the interaction effect of variables satisfaction and place of residence, the results from the UWES dimensions show the existence of significant effects as consequence of the interaction of those variables. The interaction of satisfaction and age in absorption ($F = 4.499$; $p = .036$) may be due to a further result differentiation according to the satisfaction of the subjects living off-base – trainees living off-base, with higher satisfaction, reach higher averages in absorption ($T = -4.295$; $g.l. = 108$; $p = .000$) (Fig. 1).

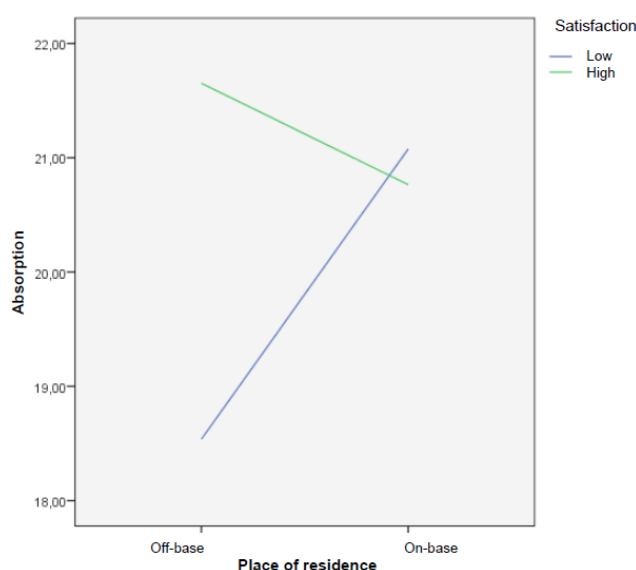


Fig. 1. Results in the absorption in function of the interaction between satisfaction and the asylum seeker condition.

The interaction of satisfaction and place of residence living with affective engagement ($F = 4.077$; $p = .045$) may be explained considering a further result differentiation between the trainees living on-base, with low satisfaction and presenting higher affective engagement when compared to the trainees living off-base, with low satisfaction but with less affective engagement ($T = -2.029$; g.l. = 50; $p = .048$). Regarding the subjects living off-base with low satisfaction, they significantly differ from the highly satisfied subjects, these latter showing more affective engagement ($T = -6.207$; g.l. = 107; $p = .000$) (Fig. 2).

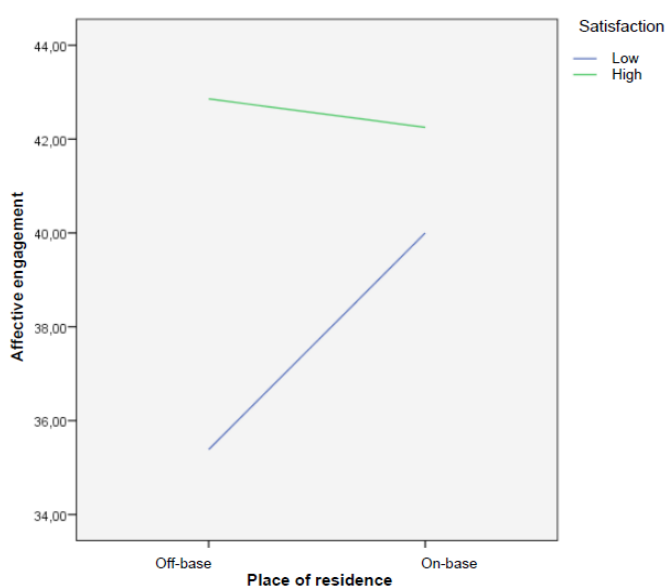


Fig. 2. Results in the affective involvement in function of the interaction between satisfaction and the asylum seeker condition.

The significant effect of the interaction of satisfaction and place of residence with the behavioral engagement ($F = 4.882$; $p = .029$) may be due to a further result differentiation among individuals with high satisfaction: those who live off-base reach higher levels of behavioral engagement when compared to those living on-base ($T = 2.159$; g.l. = 83; $p = .034$). There is also a further result differentiation within the group of individuals living off-base: the subjects presenting higher satisfaction show higher levels of behavioral engagement ($T = -7.134$; g.l. = 106; $p = .000$) (Fig. 3).

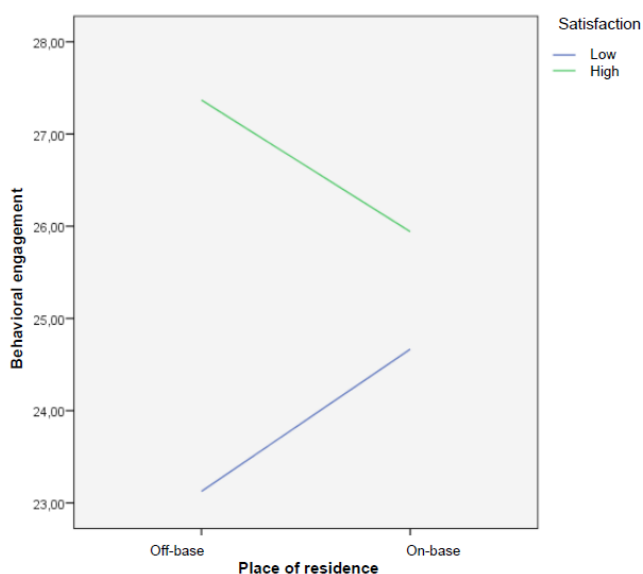


Fig. 3. Results in the behavioral involvement in function of the interaction between satisfaction and the asylum seeker condition.

4. Discussion

The results obtained allow us to state that, in general, the different kinds of engagement are heavily dependent on self-concept. However, place of residence was not identified as differentiating variable.

It is important to highlight that trainees living on-base and presenting low satisfaction levels showed higher affective engagement levels when compared to trainees living off-base. These results may be associated with the affective connection that the individual living on-base creates with the sheltering institution, which is understood as a provider (Herzberg, 1966; Maslow, 1954); with the assimilation of organizational values and purposes, which favors the relatedness of the subject with the institution (Porter et al., 1974; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002); as well as with the fact that individuals living on-base possess few distracting stimuli, which promotes greater engagement from these trainees, particularly affective engagement.

Furthermore, trainees living off-base and presenting high satisfaction levels showed higher behavioral engagement levels when compared to those living on-base. It is assumed that, because it is possible for them to physically distance themselves from the workplace and return to their families, trainees living off-base may benefit from greater stress release, psychological rest and energy recovery, which may favor a greater engagement with training and the institution.

Lastly, results show that situations with higher scores regarding the self-concept dimensions, together with the place of residence, have led to higher scores in the engagement dimensions when compared to situations with lower scores in the self-concept dimensions, and hereby allowing the predictions of a positive and significant relationship between self-concept and engagement, just as expressed by the literature (Fredricks, Blumenfeld & Paris 2004; Veiga, Robu, Appleton, Festas, & Galvão, 2014).

5. Conclusion

The present study allowed the understanding of trainee engagement regarding self-concept and the place of residence. Its results confirm that higher scores regarding self-concept led to higher scores in engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004; Glanville & Wildhagen, 2007; Silva, Ferreira, & Ferreira, 2014; Veiga et al., 2012; Veiga et al., 2014). The self-systems act in order to promote or restrict engagement (Skinner, Kindermann & Furrer, 2009). Therefore, self-concept works as a “behavior regulator, which is always present as the individual’s perception of his own different sides, whether the individual is confronting himself in situations soliciting its cognitive-affective system, or when he is interacting with others” (Simões, 2001, p.33). Hence, it is important to promote a positive self-concept in trainees, so that higher engagement levels may be obtained in training and toward the institution. This would significantly benefit both the people and the institution they work for.

As an indication for future investigations it is suggested the deepening of the study of involvement having in consideration, not only the self-concept, but also the asylum seeker condition. Helping therefore, to build a theoretical base that allows deepening the comprehension of the influence of this dimension in the involvement of students.

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